



# Independence



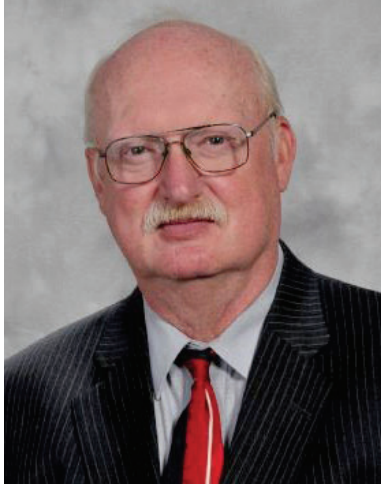
COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2023  
FOR THE CITY OF INDEPENDENCE, KANSAS

SEPTEMBER 2018

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# Message from the Mayor



Unfortunately, the Governing Body too often becomes consumed with the time constraints in preparing and approving an annual City Budget that input from the Community is neglected. Throughout the year, numerous concerns are brought to the Commissioners with the hope that these needs will be addressed during the year and during the budget process. Although not intentional, it is obvious that not all concerns can be met. Each Citizen can see different needs within our Community, and only when we come together can we adequately address them.

To develop a method that would aid the Governing Body during budget preparation, a Citizen's Advisory Committee was formed. Each Commissioner selected three citizens to become part of this committee. Bringing together their unique perspectives of community needs, they engaged the public and then established priorities based on the feedback received. The task was given to the committee to create and develop a Strategic Plan that would assemble a list of priorities for the coming years. This plan, along with the Strategic Operating Plan developed by the Governing Body and Staff, will be utilized throughout the year as a guide to address and establish budgetary priorities.

As a Community ages, the list of needs increases. When one considers the extent of the items on the list, it is easy to at times become overwhelmed. Although it is not possible to resolve all needs within a short period of time, it is possible to begin to work addressing these items that make the most notable accomplishments. It is important to remember the first step is the most critical in achieving a goal, and without that step, the list continues to grow. The completion of the Community Strategic Plan along with the Governing Body/Staff Strategic Operating Plan is that first step taken to see that the concerns of the community are being addressed.

On behalf of the Governing Body I would like to thank each committee member for their time spent preparing this document. We look forward to utilizing it and seeing its benefits as we strive towards the future development and maintenance of our Community.

*Mayor Leonhard Caflisch*

# Commissioners' Message

Several months ago, a nine person committee was selected by City Commissioners to serve on a Strategic Planning Advisory Committee. Their job was to draw input from the citizens of Independence to identify pressing issues of importance and concerns of the community. The committee conducted open dialogue sessions, created and distributed surveys, and encouraged citizens to share their thoughts and ideas on the future of our city. The committee spent countless hours processing surveys and open-meeting information that helped them identify where we need to focus our efforts as a city. A five-year plan was developed based on the input of the community-at-large. Citizens were the driving force in determining the areas most important to them and providing the City a blueprint of how to address these issues in the future. The priorities identified by the community will help the City plan and allocate resources towards meeting the needs of the public as we move forward. I would like to thank the Advisory Committee for giving their time and talents, and the community-at-large for participating in this endeavor. As Commissioners, we look forward to working hand-in-hand with the community towards solutions that will make our city more viable and attractive for present and future residents.

*– Commissioner Louis Ysusi*



*Gary Hogsett*



*Louis Ysusi*

# Meet Independence



Located in Southeast Kansas, Independence is the county seat of Montgomery County and a premier location between Kansas City and Tulsa. Settled in 1869, Independence has a unique place in American history, including being home to Academy Award-winning screenwriter William Inge, the first outdoor baseball game with a permanent lighting system, the first coast-to-coast radio broadcast, and briefly the residence of Mickey Mantle while he played for the Independence Yankees in the minor leagues.

Independence was first prominently put in the spotlight in the early 1900s when an unexpected oil boom promoted its rapid growth, helping to establish a strong community centered on industry. In the decades following the prosperity of oil money, the community continues to support successful businesses such as Textron Aviation, Standard Motors, MATCOR, Hackney and Sons, MFG, Precision Railway, and John Deere, all of which conduct their operations here. As the nation's leader in the number of planes built in a single city and home to Independence Municipal Airport, aviation is a prominent and important industry in Independence, with a broad spectrum of supporting skill provided by the workforce in and surrounding Independence. Agriculture likewise plays a key part in the community's foundation and livelihood, diversifying local production between industry and agriculture and keeping the long-lasting traditions and histories in those businesses alive.

While many small cities and towns across the nation have seen a deterioration of that "main street" location and feeling, Independence has found a way to buck the trend. The thriving movie theater, numerous stores and restaurants, and beautiful arrays of trees, flags, and statues that line the intersection of Main Street and Pennsylvania Avenue stand as physical evidence that community comes first here. Independence truly takes pride in this lively meeting place of commerce and social events.

Today, Independence remains an ideal town in middle-America. The rolling hills and rivers offer wonderful running trails and fishing locations and serve as an attractive location for any lover of the outdoors. Additionally, the city provides its residents with opportunities to learn and train with cutting-edge technology through such institutions as the Independence Community College and the renowned Fab Lab. The Riverside Park and Zoo, the premier park and zoo of SE Kansas, holds a special place in the heart of the people, and the renowned Neewollah is the largest fall festival in the state, attracting over 65,000 visitors each year. But more than anything, the main reason for Independence's continued success is its dedicated community. The people here care about the city's well-being and image deeply. They want Independence to be seen in the way they see it – a fascinating place full of history; small and comfortable; friendly and accommodating; and, most of all, home.

# Independence Strategic Plan

The central purpose in this undertaking was to provide Independence with a tool that can be used by elected officials and city staff to guide goal setting and focus efforts on those things that residents have identified as their highest priorities. In order to truly be effective, this plan needs to become part of how elected officials and city staff operate and think about programs and services. Ultimately, it needs to be incorporated into how we measure success. No matter how comprehensive this plan is, the test of its usefulness will be defined by how effective it is in guiding decisions and creating the future to which citizens aspire.

## The Methodologies

The City Commission appointed a group of citizens to serve on the City's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC). The purpose of this committee was to gather data from the citizenry and synthesize that information into a set of recommended strategic directives.

The methodologies utilized by the SPAC included the following:

- Community dialogue sessions
- Stakeholder focus group meetings
- Citizen surveys
- Business meetings
- Announcements at Special Events

In all, the committee was able to gather over 500 responses through a citizen survey and synthesize that input into clear priorities. Almost 200 individuals participated in the various stakeholder meetings and community dialogue sessions. Participants in the process were able to provide the SPAC with information related to key initiatives and improvements they would like to see implemented.

Below are some quotes and a word cloud gathered from the citizen surveys:

"I love the sense of community! Independence is so tight knit and if you're from Indy you're proud to be."

"There is a true sense of volunteerism in our community. You have to try hard not to be involved in something in Independence."

What do you like most about Independence?

Neewollah Strong Safe Quiet Future Group Job Hometown  
Family Spirit Small Town Not much Traffic  
Community Elk City Independence Efforts  
Park Rich Opportunity Fellowship Big Options Needs Size



# Independence Strategic Plan

## Explanation and Definition of Key Strategic Plan Elements

In the process of examining this strategic plan, the reader will encounter various terms and phrases associated with key elements of the plan. It is important that we place an understanding of the strategic plan within the context of what these elements are intended to contribute.

### **Primary Directive**

This is a statement that clearly describes the city's rationale for existing. It is the product of what we in Independence are passionate about, where our competencies lie, and what we believe provides the means to realize our community vision. The Primary Directive represents the highest-level directive, serving as the hub of the plan to which all other strategic directives are attached.

### **Strategic Directives**

This plan contains 5 strategic directives. A strategic directive is a very high-level priority that is articulated in a way that effectively describes a community priority. Directives are not intended to describe specific initiatives, ideas, programs, or services. They merely capture in a very general way what citizens believe is most important in their community.

### **Strategic Initiative**

Each strategic directive is accompanied by a number of strategic initiatives which assist in bringing the directive to the level of application. In other words, strategic initiatives are more specific actions, programs, and ideas designed to bring about the realization of the strategic directives. A directive is a destination and the initiatives represent the directions that will enable us to arrive at our destination.

# The Primary Directive of Independence

The primary purpose of government is to provide a foundation for civilized living. While this concept may appear elementary and more than intuitive, much debate in recent years has swirled around the role of government. It is therefore critical that, before presenting the community strategic direction, the City define its role in the lives of its citizens. We do this by formulating and articulating the Primary Directive of Independence.

This is the essence and reason sustaining the existence of the City of Independence. It lies at the intersection of three things:

1. ***What city leaders, residents, and staff have a deep passion for*** – Why do we come to work every day? What motivates us? Why do we care about what happens in Independence?
2. ***What we believe the city can do well or even better than any other city*** – Are we uniquely positioned to do something extraordinary? What are we equipped to accomplish? This is a question of not only what we can do, but what we can do better than others.
3. ***What drives the city's resource engine*** – What is it that needs to happen in order to empower us to realize this primary directive?

In Independence, our Primary Directive is

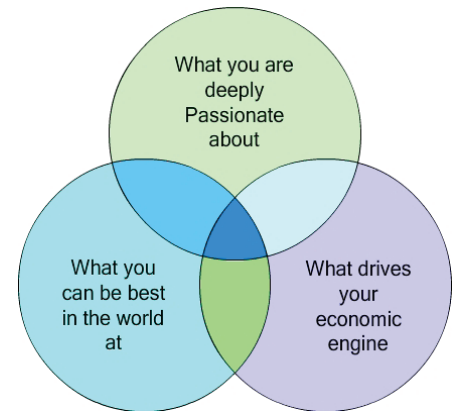
**“Build upon our unique sense of community by offering residents the vibrant, welcoming environment that has led people to call Independence home for generations.”**



# The Primary Directive of Independence

## *What are we deeply passionate about?*

In Independence, we have a passion for elevating and sustaining quality-of-life. We understand completely the sacred trust that is ours: to maximize our citizens' investment by supporting those programs, initiatives, and ideas that will translate into an opportunity for them to live the life they hoped to find when they first came here. We believe that our passionate commitment to our community vision and values, combined with careful planning and purposeful follow-through, will translate into every resident's opportunity for a better life.



## *What can we be the best in the world at?*

With our location in the heart of rural America, Independence is uniquely positioned to build a community that enables a truly friendly and inclusive quality of life for our residents. Volunteerism here is vibrant and enables all residents to have the opportunity to serve and get to know their neighbors. Quite simply, there are few places in the world with this kind of city-family mentality.

## *What drives our economic, or in the public sector, our resource engine?*

We believe that as we are able to lift our citizens' quality-of-life, we will have demonstrated our competency and trustworthiness. As we demonstrate these qualities, we will generate trust from citizens. As our citizens' trust increases, they are more likely to continue to invest in the services that we provide. As they do so, we are empowered to continue lifting our level of service, which results in greater trust, and so the process repeats itself. Public trust drives Independence's resource engine.

All programs, initiatives, and energy must therefore be focused on achieving the Primary Directive. All metrics and outcomes should support this Primary Directive. The strategic plan's role in fulfilling the Primary Directive begins by defining what citizens believe is essential to quality of life. As a precursor to developing the strategic plan, the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee was able to identify 5 factors that citizens believe define quality of life in Independence. These are:

1. Economic Development
2. Infrastructure
3. Beautification
4. Parks & Recreation
5. Community Spirit & Unity

# Strategic Directive 1

## Economic Development



*“I want to live in a community where there are well-paying employment opportunities that allow me to provide for my family.”*

Independence has faced significant changes in economic development over the years. As a city once built on the oil industry, Independence has learned to adapt and shift its focus. These changes have contributed to a gradual decline in population in the region, which has remained constant over the past two decades. In spite of these changes, Independence is home to an array of successful businesses and a talented workforce. It is imperative that we foster economic development and bring more jobs to Independence. These efforts have a ripple effect, as a higher number of available jobs will bring an increase in population, more shopping and dining options to meet that increased population, and other aspects of financial prosperity associated with a growing city.

### Key Initiatives:

- Review economic development plan for retention and growth of existing businesses, and new businesses recruitment
- Continue partnerships with Montgomery County and neighboring cities in business recruitment efforts
- Support expansion of medical services in Independence
- Address tax incentives for different and new types of businesses
- Make beautification improvements to downtown area
- Recruit a “recreational business” (bowling alley, skating rink, etc.)
- Enforce vacant building inspection and registry
- Evaluate revenue sources that can be used toward Economic Development Fund

### What Does Success Look Like?

- Increase in population of Independence
- Increase in sales tax revenue for the City due to more purchases and economic activity
- Decrease in the unemployment rate in Independence
- Decrease in the number of vacant buildings in downtown area
- Increase in gas tax revenue and other tax revenues from increased economic activity
- Increase in the number of doctors and/or medical services provided in Independence
- Increase in Guest Tax revenue for city due to increased number of visitors to Independence

# Strategic Directive 2

## Infrastructure



*“I want to live in a community where I can safely travel across town, with working roads and well-maintained public structures.”*

Municipal infrastructure across the country has faced steady decline in recent years. In Independence, this translates to needed improvements to roads, sidewalks, and city buildings. The City will focus resources on making these needed improvements. From increasing budgetary allocation to fixing streets, to making decisions on the use of publicly owned buildings, this directive reflects a commitment from the City to show citizens and potential business-owners alike, the pride we have for Independence and its maintenance.

### Key Initiatives:

- Increase budget allocation for road and sidewalk improvements
- Develop and implement Utility Maintenance Plan and Capital Plan
- Complete implementation of automated water meters throughout the City
- Perform long-term capital planning
- Perform annual review of street conditions and planned improvements
- Review and update 5-year Rate Study at 2.5-year midterm
- Maintain commitment to ADA compliance
- Make decision on City Hall and Public Safety facilities to address the long-term facilities needs of the City

### What Does Success Look Like?

- Completed milestones on capital plans
- Increased budget to road improvements
- Improvement in Pavement Condition Index
- Efficiently operating Geographic Information System (GIS)

# Strategic Directive 3

## Beautification



*“I want to live in a place that is clean and well-kept, where I am proud to bring family and friends to visit.”*

Along with aging infrastructure, the physical appearance of Independence has declined in recent years. This includes multiple abandoned houses, the upkeep of numerous homes and yards, and litter and debris on sidewalks and streets. The City will focus resources towards addressing these issues. City beautification will help enhance our reputation with visitors as we seek to attract potential residents and businesses. In addition, a beautiful community will provide a solid support for economic growth and foster the special sense of community that has developed in our city over many years.

### Key Initiatives:

- Increase budget and timeline on removing abandoned houses
- Re-configure city trash to once a week trash pickup to free up resources for increase in other pickup services
- Expand recycling pickup services
- Focus on neighborhood beautification through strict code enforcement in residential areas
- Expand partnership with Love Independence and other organizations in beautification efforts

### What Does Success Look Like?

- Reduction in the number of abandoned houses
- Decrease in trash and other items found in streets and in front of homes
- Increase in neighborhood property values
- Realize more efficient operation of trash pickup
- Increase in participation rate in recycling program

# Strategic Directive 4

## Parks & Recreation



*“I want to live in a city where my family can enjoy outdoor recreation, and where my kids have options of fun things to do.”*

Independence is home to what is arguably the crown jewel of Southeast Kansas: Riverside Park and Zoo. Residents of both Independence and the surrounding region enjoy the public facilities available here, and this has become a point of pride for the community. Over the next 5 years, it is important that we do not lose sight of what this town does exceptionally well, and that we leverage this valuable asset in our overall plan. Maintaining a high-quality park and improving facilities and offerings across town will build the City’s reputation and provide recreational opportunities to residents.

### Key Initiatives:

- Address branding and tourism position and analyze additional marketing opportunities to attract visitors
- Review plan of smaller parks and optimize and/or consolidate amenities
- Expand summer and educational camps for kids
- Develop and implement Zoo enhancement and maintenance plan
- Partner with neighboring cities’ senior centers to expand activities for senior citizens
- Increase partnership to promote Neewollah and other community events beyond SE Kansas

### What Does Success Look Like?

- Increased number of visitors to park and zoo facilities
- Increased attendance of Neewollah and other community events
- Pass ADA accreditation for Zoo facilities

# Strategic Directive 5

## Community Spirit & Unity



*“I want to live in a community that feels like an extension of my family. One where we can trust the City’s decisions, one where we see the best in one another, and that no matter your background, you feel like you belong.”*

In order for this plan to be successfully implemented, public trust in the City government and civility amongst its citizens is critical. Building trust with the public starts with a transparent culture where the public feels informed about City decisions. Citizens should feel like their voices are being heard, and that kindness and respect permeate public dialogue. Every citizen and visitor of Independence should feel included in the Independence family.

### Key Initiatives:

- Consider modifications to governing body and size of City Commission
- Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to create direct channel of communication between the Diversity Taskforce and City Leadership
- Increase communication through live streaming and media facilities from the City regarding announcements and budgetary decisions
- Conduct annual survey for citizen satisfaction

### What Does Success Look Like?

- Reduced number of negative and/or critical publications in local newspapers and online sites
- Positive citizen survey responses on the positivity, friendliness, and inclusiveness of the City
- Increased feeling of inclusion from all Independence residents (as measured by survey)
- Increased number of social media updates and announcements from the City
- Increased voter turnout in City elections



# The Strategic Planning Process

The Independence City Commission determined the need to bring focus to spending priorities, and addressing the needs of the citizens of Independence. Key to this endeavor was the creation of a community strategic plan. The Commission determined that such an initiative, if it were to survive and become truly useful to the community, would need to become a community initiative driven by citizens.



The Mayor and Commission therefore appointed a committee of citizen volunteers, known as the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) to drive the strategic planning process. The strategic planning process began with SPAC meetings with staff and Commission members in order to define expectations and understand community priorities. These meetings also assisted the committee in identifying critical stakeholder groups that would need to be engaged during the strategic planning process.

Stakeholder meetings were then held with business groups, service clubs, civic and charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, high school students, housing facilities, and a host of others. An open house was held, and the public was invited to participate in generating both community priorities and ideas that would eventually form the basis for these strategic directives communicated in this plan. Surveys were administered on the city website as well as distributed to city email groups, volunteers, and community event attendees. The process of gathering stakeholder input spanned over a month. At the end of this process, the SPAC began to synthesize the hundreds of pieces of information they had gathered from citizens into more specific focus areas, more commonly referred to as “strategic directives.” Ultimately, 5 strategic directives were produced. The committee, utilizing these community priorities, then produced specific strategic initiatives associated with each focus area. The final plan was adopted by the Commission in September of 2018. It will stand as the planning blueprint for the city until 2023.



# Implementation of the Plan

Simply having a plan does not ensure its implementation. The City should take specific measures in order to implement this strategic plan and measure progress toward its realization. Specifically, the City should:

- Utilize this plan as the basis for annual strategic planning and goal setting.
- Annually establish and review outcome measures associated with strategic plan directives. Make adjustments as necessary to ensure close correlation between outcome measures and plan directives.
- Create a community scorecard for city and citizen use. This should be in a highly illustrative format, accessible electronically via the City's website. The site should provide data associated with previously identified outcome measures. It is critical that this information is kept as current as possible.
- Annually provide the City Commission and departmental decision-makers with a city business plan, which ties Commission goals to strategic directives, identifying critical outcomes, measures, objectives, and expected budget impacts.
- Report semi-annually strategic plan implementation progress and impacts.



# Special Thanks

The strategic planning process and composition is a broad-based community endeavor. Generally speaking, the broader the base of community participation, the greater the survivability of the plan. In Independence, this was certainly and fortunately the case. Nevertheless, the City expresses its appreciation to specific individuals and groups that made this initiative possible. Special thanks go to:

- The Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (Mike Baldassaro, Jean Barnett, Jerry Bright, Dean Hayse, Pastor Brandee Mimitzraiem, Pastor Michael Rose, Philipp Umlauf, Rick Mott, and Tim White).
- The Independence Rotary Club, Optimist, Progressive Ministerial Union, Barean Christian Mission Center, Community United Feeding Friends and other church groups, engaged students of Independence High School, Penn Terrace Senior Living, the Independence Diversity Taskforce, the Lion's Club, the Chamber of Commerce, Independence Non-Profits, and the City of Independence Employees.
- April Nutt, Joanne Smith, Lisa Wilson, Michelle Flanigan, Kathy Shepard, Trisha Purdon, Kelly Passauer, Craig Whitehead, Jason McAfee, Fred Meier, Dan Barwick, Representative Jim Kelly, and members of the Community Engagement Subcommittee.
- The Citizens of Independence, without whose participation this plan would not be possible.
- Dan Griffiths & Mackey Smith – Tanner LLC, public sector consulting, for the facilitation of the strategic planning process and the production of the strategic plan.

